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Nigeria: many programmes, many media, many poor

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to x-ray some developmental programmes targeted at poverty alleviation of past Nigerian governments both Military and Civilian. Also, to find out why poverty still thrives in Nigeria despite such laudable programmes such as the Operation Feed the Nation, NEEDS, DFFRI among others. One problem that has been identified is the problem of continuity among successive governments. When a new government comes into power then the projects/programmes of the previous government become a forgotten issue. The role of the media have been identified as important to the continuity of such programmes and to hold government accountable for areas where they have given citizens false hope and have failed. The media are saddled with the responsibility of promoting development policies and winning the acceptance of the citizenry for such policies. Thus, the media should shift from traditional journalism to development journalism; government and relevant agencies should make information accessible to the media to help them fulfil their watchdog role and stringent measures should be put in place to ensure that only qualified people benefit from such programmes. Above all, government is continuous and poverty alleviation programmes irrespective of the originator should be continuous too.

Keywords: Civilian, Media, Military, Poor

1. Introduction

One of the most serious and concerning factors seemingly impeding the development of developing countries is poverty. This state of being in the confine of limited or no growth, pinned down due to “very high transport costs and small market size, low-productivity agriculture, a very high disease burden, adverse geopolitics and a very slow diffusion of technology from abroad” is what Sachs, McArthur, Schmidt-Traub, Kruk, Bahadur, Faye, and McCord, (2004) call “poverty traps” (p. 130, 121). Unless emerging countries deal with these poverty traps, which further include, high economic poverty, inadequate water supplies, education, corruption, insurgences, and poor sanitation to name a few, development will continue to be a mirage.

In a bid to overcome poverty, Nigeria, right from independence in 1960, led by Late Nnamdi Azikiwe the first indigenous Governor General and President, pushed a cause for poverty eradication. Since then, poverty alleviation programmes more or less became regime oriented. However, present alleviation programmes such as, National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), Subsidy reinvestment programme (SURE-P), and The Economic Transformation Agenda, are designed to accommodate the realisation of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) alongside every member state of United Nations (OSSAP-MDGs, 2013) ^[14].

Although, Nigeria has been listed among countries that have drastically reduced extreme poverty in the past few years, it still ranks third among nations whose majority live in extreme poverty (United Nations, 2014) ^[25]. This equates to the country playing host to nine percent, preceded by China and India leaving it among sub-Saharan Africa region who still “lag behind” and are “unlikely to meet the target by 2015” (United Nations, 2014 p. 9) ^[25].

As reported by *The Guardian*, a former Senior Special Assistant to the President on Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Dr. Precious Kalamba Gbenoel admitted that “poverty eradication has remained the major challenge facing the country in the achievement of MDGs” (Okeke, 2014 para 1) ^[12].

Meanwhile, the far reaching importance and effects of the media in development has been studied and attested to by scholars, so much so that Anaeto and Solo-Anaeto (2010) ^[3] argue

that the development media theory, mandates “that until a nation is well established and its development well underway, media should support and promote national development programmes” (p. 21).

Nigeria Media industry houses about hundred television stations, one hundred and forty radio stations, and thirteen major print media outlets (Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation, 2011) ^[10], and Section 22 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) mandates them accordingly, to “at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this chapter and uphold the responsibility of the government to the people.”

Therefore, it is with the understanding of the discussion so far that this paper will concentrate on poverty eradication in Nigeria and the mass media environment. Why has poverty eradication remained a mirage after numerous poverty reduction strategies and the presence of a large mass media industry? Where exactly did these two proponents of change (mass media and government poverty reduction programmes) go wrong? How can they be resuscitated to function well for the purpose of poverty eradication and national development? To answer these questions, this paper through the lens of available literature and previous studies, will examine the efforts of the Nigerian Government in eradicating poverty, their pitfalls, present struggles, the media in this context and the way forward.

2. Poverty in the Nigerian Context

The paradoxical nature of poverty in Nigeria, that is, being the largest economy in Africa (BBC 2014) ^[5] and having about 60% of the population living in extreme poverty earning below \$1.25 a day (World Bank, 2014) ^[27] prompts for a clarification of the term poverty.

It is worthy to note that poverty is as old as the world itself; still there is no set definition due to various compositions and diversity in perspectives of human understanding. In its simplest form, poverty refers to the inability of an individual to have the financial power to acquire basic human needs. According to UNDP (1997) in its Human Development Report, poverty is “the denial of opportunities and choices most basic to human development – to lead a long healthy creative life and to enjoy a decent standard of living, freedom, dignity, self-esteem and the respect of others” (p. 5). Poverty in Nigeria is multifaceted and deep-rooted causing a major challenge and frustration for its alleviation and the development of the nation. This phenomenon is not categorically peculiar to Nigeria as Arogundade, Adebisi, and Ogunro (2011) ^[4] posit that:

there are enormous factors responsible for the poverty incidence. The causes are ubiquitous and in the psyche of the ruled and the rulers. While the ruled struggle to escape the poverty circle, the rulers are conscious of sliding back to experience poverty; thereby promoting corruption, misrule, injustice and other social vices. These scenarios notwithstanding, government of any affected nation must be seen as taking conscious efforts to address the problems of poverty. This attempt though may be taunted with deceit and or sincerity of purpose, but it deserves an assessment of research for policy recommendation purposes (p.42).

2.1 Poverty Reduction Strategies in the Nigerian State

The nature of poverty in Nigeria calls for concern and the need for its alleviation “as a means of improving the standard of living of the people, has led to the conceptualization and implementation of various targeted or non-targeted poverty alleviation programmes worldwide” (Oyesanmi, Ebioyefi and Aderiti, 2005, p. 4) ^[19] attracting different stakeholders-Nigerian government and donor agencies. These programmes mostly come in the form of empowerment opportunities, given to masses to enable the capacity of wealth creation and better living. The nature of interventions which may include, agriculture, health, education, vocational training, employment, mentoring, etc. are specifically chosen by sponsors according to goals, societal need, scope worthy of improvement or/and viability of a channel for development.

Sponsored by the Nigerian Government, Poverty alleviation/reduction programmes in the country dates back to independence in 1960. With information as his philosophy to development, the Late Nnamdi Azikwe led administration centred its poverty eradication exertion on education. Dawodu (n.d, p.1) recorded that “Show the light, and the people will find the way” was the oft-quoted mantra by Nigeria’s First President. Taking the cue from the first president, poverty alleviation programmes more or less became regime oriented. Meanwhile, first ladies most times have programmes dedicated to women advocacy and maternal/child health (Alfa, Otaida and Audu, 2014) ^[2].

However, being the head of State of Nigeria from 1966-1975, Gen. Yakubu Gowon established the National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP), and the Nigerian Agricultural Co-operative Bank (NACB), which were devoted to funding agriculture. Overthrown by the Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo (1976-1979), Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) 1976 replaced NAFPP and NACB only to succeed in “creating awareness of food shortages and the need to tackle the problem” (Arogundade, *et al.* 2011, p.43) ^[4]. Still on agriculture, Shehu Shagari (1979-1983) established The Green Revolution in 1979 while his successor Gen. Muhammad Buhari (1983-1985) adopted the Military style to control corruption through WAI (War against Indiscipline) programme, and agriculture via Go Back to Land programme.

Gen. Ibrahim Babangida (1985-1993) is one Head of State that introduced a “welter of poverty alleviation programmes” (Arogundade *et al.* 2011 p.43) ^[4]. Nigerian Agricultural Land development Authority (NALDA) 1986, Directorate of Food Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFFRI) 1986, National Directorate of Employment (NDE) 1986, Better Life Programme (BLP) 1987 led by the first lady, People’s Bank of Nigeria (PBN) 1989, and Community Banks (CB) 1990 were all his initiatives.

General Sani Abacha (1993-1998), however, had two programmes. Family Support Programme (FSP) 1994 led by the First Lady and Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) 1998, both for Health care delivery, youth development, and credit facilities for small scale entrepreneurial businesses (Orji, 2005) ^[13].

Olusegun Obasanjo ruling as a civilian head of state (1999-2007) founded Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) 2000, National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) 2001 and National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS) 2004, to cater for employment, adult literacy, reduction of crime, and national resources development/conversation (Aderogba, 2012) ^[1].

All the poverty alleviation programmes established as at 2001 are defunct. Majority were conducted on a small-scale basis with emphasis on rural dwellers, agriculture and small-scale businesses. This approach as explained by Ogwumike (2005) ^[18] requires proper identification of the target group to minimize leakages.

Despite, the “huge budgeting outlays attached to these programmes” (Orji 2005 p.36) ^[13] they fizzled out with/or in less than the four-year tenure of every Civilian President and the duration each Military Government had in power until it was overthrown via a coup. Government is said to be continuous, but not in respect to Poverty Alleviation Programmes in Nigeria. Dawodu (n.d p. 2) expresses that each “administration came with a different idea or no idea ...there was hardly any continuity with those initiated by previous governments.” Beneficiaries and management of programmes of a previous government noticing this lackadaisical attitude might have embraced unaccountability, embezzlement, misuse of resources, neglect etc. causing a final crash in projects.

Apart from issues surrounding lack of continuity, corruption, wrong beneficiaries and understanding of the programmes’ philosophies were some other causes of failure. On the one hand, the National Accelerated Food Production Programme, Operation Feed the Nation, Green Revolution, and Go Back to Land programmes which were all targeted at Agriculture, suffered “faulty philosophy” (Maduagwu, 2000, para 6) ^[9] on the part of the government who thought of making a farmer out of everyone. On the other hand, the programmes disbursed money to wrong beneficiaries who all pretended to have turned farmers to be eligible for the funds.

Strongly supporting perspectives of several scholars, (Maduagwu, 2000; Elumilade, Asaolu and Adereti 2006) ^[9] amongst the reasons why past poverty alleviation attempts failed were:

- i. The politics of personal rule – a distinctive type of political system in which the rivalries and struggles of powerful and wilful persons, rather than impersonal institutions, ideologies, public offices, or class interests, are fundamental in shaping political life.
- ii. The master and servant relationships associated with the programmes to alleviate poverty. Government claims to know and understand what poverty is, who the poor are and what they need in order to alleviate poverty, whereas, only the poor understands poverty and it is only the poor that should tell how it can be alleviated.

Incapability of alleviation programmes’ initiators to understand the infrastructure of the people, lack of long term funding, building up on condescending assumptions, misuse of channels for different audiences are some other reasons why such programmes could have failed.

In the light of the MDGs, Nigeria from year 2000 has tried to harness these goals with national development plans, especially as it concerns poverty eradication. OSSAP-MDGs (2013) ^[14] explains that:

MDGs targets and programmes have been mainstreamed in successive development plans, strategies and sector-specific policies, including the Seven Point Agenda in 2007, the Economic Transformation Agenda, and the Nigeria Vision 20:2020 First Implementation Plan 2010–2013 (p.2).

Late Umaru Musa Yar’Adua (2007-2010) initiated the Seven Point Agenda (2007) and Nigeria Vision 20:2020 (2010). While the former caters for Power and Energy, Agriculture, Employment, Transportation, Security and Functional Education, the latter is to have Nigeria among the league of the first global 20 economies by the year 2020.

The Economic Transformation Agenda (2011) and Subsidy reinvestment programmes (SURE-P) established in 2012 were put in place by the immediate past President of Nigeria Goodluck Ebele Jonathan (2010-2015). These programmes were implemented nationally to cater for maternal and child health, community services/women and youth employment programmes, urban mass transit programme, vocational training schemes, water and agriculture (OSSAP-MDGs 2013) ^[14]. Meanwhile, the current President of Nigeria Muhammadu Buhari who is less than one year in office as at publication of this paper has not launched any poverty development programme.

Unlike the defunct poverty alleviation programmes, the running ones are carried out on a larger scale with other tiers of government involved. There also seem to be a level of continuity in programmes, which cannot be dissociated from Nigeria’s commitment to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. In addition, this period 1999 till date is “the period when the nation just returned to participatory democracy after 16years of military incursion into the Nigerian polity” (Owolabi and O’neill, 2014, p. 66) ^[16].

Despite the numerous government-sponsored programmes evaluated so far (not disregarding efforts from bilateral or multilateral international organisations, and non-governmental organisations, which are not the focus of this paper), poverty eradication remains a dream in Nigeria. With less than hundred days to the elapse of the Millennium Development Goals, about 60% of the country’s population still live in extreme poverty and meeting the 2015 target of 21.40% seems unrealistic. Therefore, the need to proffer solutions to the problems of the failed poverty alleviation strategies is very much needed.

Considering that the militating elements of poverty eradication as discussed earlier lean more on human factors, which include the government officials and programme staff members, the roles of the fourth estate of the realm in ensuring effectiveness of the poverty alleviation programmes would be subsequently discussed.

3. The Mandate: Mass Media in Poverty Alleviation

Considering the volume of literature available on roles of media in development, one cannot overemphasise its value and far-reaching effects. In the absence of the media, Okunna (2000) expresses that maintenance of “constant flow of vital information for economic growth, national development is bound to be stagnated or at best be retarded” (as cited in Owolabi and O’neill, 2014, p.65) ^[16]. The mass media have the capability to educate, persuade, mobilise, mould opinions and inform (Raufu, 2011) ^[20]. Radio, the “most effective means of communication in Africa” (Jallov, 2012 p.118) ^[8] can be used to propagate government programs on poverty alleviation, leading to better understanding, and gearing development on the part of the masses. Audiences are not only informed, educated and entertained; the media, through the agenda setting power and new roles that borders on development of the society, influence the importance that audiences place on issues (Owolabi, 2014) ^[15].

Theoretical frameworks bind the existence of the mass media. In the sphere of development, the development media theory saddles the media with the responsibility of promoting development, amid grassroots participation by producing contents that would meet cultural and social needs. Anaeto and Solo-Anaeto (2010) ^[3] state that “the theory argues that until a nation is well established and its development well underway, media should support and promote national development programmes” (p.11). The social responsibility theory of the press, however, explains that the media have an obligation to be responsible to the public and if it is not so, then some agencies of the public should enforce it, a core value of this essay (Raufu, 2011) ^[20].

3.1 Nigerian Media in Poverty Alleviation Programmes: Hitherto

Only a few literature on how the Nigerian media have been involved in poverty alleviation was found. From the inception of Poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria, Orji (2005) ^[13] explains that every programme made provision for the media but the fourth estate failed. On the one hand, Family Support Programme stated clearly to implement its programme through “sponsoring media captions, news talk, television and radio discussions” (p. 202). On the other hand, “lack of deep rooted conceptualisation and packaging” of Better Life Programme (BLP), “to address the real problems of poverty merely reduced its activities to slogans and jamborees by exclusive women in corridors of power using electronic and print media to implement the programme” (Orji, 2005, p.193) ^[13].

The claim of media usage for implementation turned into show off and oppression on the media as this was a trend during the military dispensation. However, despite these obstacles and uncertainties, which include detentions and killings, the Nigerian mass media fought military dictatorship through their reports and commentaries (Ochonogor, 2008) ^[11].

In Aderogba’s study on *Media preference for an effective dissemination of poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria’s semi-urban setting: Iwo town in perspective*, conducted in 2012, 77.7 percent of the respondents affirmed to being aware of Federal Government poverty alleviation programmes. However, 26.8 percent were familiar with NAPEP, 15.6 percent with NDE, 8.1 with NEEDS while 12.8 percent claimed not to have knowledge of any of the three programmes.

The percentage might not strike a chord, but calculating the number of people involved shows that a huge significant portion of the populace is not aware and for those aware their knowledge of the activities of these programmes is limited. Interestingly, the audience awareness seems to be dropping as years go by. The audiences were most aware of the National Directorate of Employment established in 1986, then NAPEP in 2000, than, NEEDS of 2001. This seems to be an irony considering that over the years, “the media industry has witnessed tremendous progress in terms of expansion, coverage technology, personnel and managerial capabilities” (Owolabi and O’neill, 2013, p.247) ^[16]

Commercial pressures, editorial interest, ownership among others, are factors consuming the media, which could be linked to a decline/lack of interest in poverty alleviation matters. The media is trying to stay in business and one expects them to promote poverty eradication, where exactly would the motivation emanate from? Wood and Barnes, (2007) further explains that:

this situation seems to have exerted pressure towards coverage of more conventional topics for better-off audiences, creating problems for journalists who need to find editorial space and receptive audiences for their coverage of poverty reduction issues... Poverty is such an everyday reality and so widespread that it is not considered of interest to public audiences and, therefore, not sellable (p.27).

Owolabi and O’neill (2014) ^[16] in their research on *Mass Media, Governance & Poverty Reduction Strategy in Nigeria: A Role Evaluation* explain that most of the reports from the media:

lacked development contents and were mostly on tragic occurrences such as religious crises and inter-tribal disputes. Giving Nigeria’s unenviable development profile in general and poverty rating in particular, it could be assumed that no other issue attract more attention than poverty and hunger...out of 344 stories analysed, only 48 were on poverty and hunger (p. 70).

Challenges faced by the media should however not be overlooked as sometimes information needed to play this role could be inaccessible. It has been exposed by Owolabi and O’neill (2014) ^[16] that “it is a common practice for government officials to keep the media at safe distance knowing that if they are too close, men of the press may want to ask certain questions, that border on the probity and accountability” (p. 71).

This however, is no excuse. The watchdog function of the mass media needs to be enforced, but not to be overridden or confused with ‘witch hunting’, in order to make the government a bit relaxed and welcoming, giving the media space to perform their duty. Ajayi (2007) clarifies witch hunting and watch dog thus:

being a watchdog does not mean that media should be unnecessarily anti-government. The media in a democracy should be an unbiased umpire, arbiter and ombudsman rather than align with a partisan opposition. For a progressive media, the welfare of the people should be supreme law. If it is true that the mass media is committed to and crusading for the welfare of the majority, then it should give support to any government that shows commitment to the greatest good for the greatest number of people (as cited in Ochonogor (2008, p. 125) ^[11].

Meanwhile, in Oyesanmi, Eboiyehi and Adereti’s (2005) ^[19] study, the authors talked to the “core-poor, men and women who had obtained credits for the purpose of alleviating poverty” (p.9). Results show that in order to ensure accountability and efficiency of programmes, “information should be well disseminated in order to create public awareness through broad based participation and supports from the media” (p. 12). This shows that the Nigerian populace have noticed that the media is not doing enough. Meanwhile, the state of these programmes and poverty

eradication at large relies extensively on the media's action or inaction.

Seconded by Raufu (2011) ^[20] highly supported by this paper,

In Nigeria for instance the problem is not about policy formulation but ineffective implementation of policies arising often from lack of inadequate media support or involvement. No matter how good a policy might be, implementation for the masses without effective support of the media (to inform and subsequently mobilize public support) is likely to facilitate untimely death for the policy. Lack of adequate media support form a significant part of reasons that programmes like NAPEP, People Bank, NEEDS, SEEDS etc. have failed to perform effectively well enough to change or impact on our cultures the way they had done in and for the other cultures (countries) from where the ideas were borrowed (p. 230).

Absolute power corrupts; therefore, the lack of checks and balances which is primarily expected from the media enables mismanagement of such strategies. Information they also say is power. Adequate and proper information accessed via the mass media to masses do not only reinforce checks and balances, it creates an enabling environment for them to work together for the effectiveness of such programmes as development, according to Soola (2003) ^[22] "must be of the people, by the people and for the people" (p. 15).

4. Conclusion

The underlining function of the media should not be overlooked as so much is expected of and could be achieved through the intervention of the fourth estate. It can be concluded that the mass media have not done so much regarding the poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria. However, studies as analysed above have shown the need for the media and citizens' yearn for its active participation. Professionals are available in terms of planning and coordinating poverty alleviation programmes. Strategies should be put in place to monitor the affairs. It might not look like a direct function of the media but we all know that everyone fears the media and would do the right thing knowing the public is watching. With a country with massive instruments –media, poverty alleviation programmes, Nongovernmental organisations, natural resources, high human resources- negligence on the part of internal components cannot be afforded. To eradicate poverty, it requires a concerted effort of everyone playing their roles faithfully; it is only when people perceive one to be striving for change that help can arise.

5. Recommendations

In this paper, the poverty eradication strategies in Nigeria have been discussed, the nature of intervention as well as causes of down falls. The nature of the media's involvement hitherto and challenges impeding the discharge of development duties were also analysed. Thus, the following recommendations are proposed:

- The media should live up to their responsibilities of propagation, and supporting of the cause of poverty eradication programmes in Nigeria.

- The media should take a shift from traditional journalism to development journalism, which according to Oyero (2012) ^[17] says, "media must accept and carry out positive development task in line with nationally established policy" (p. 23).
- The mass media alongside poverty alleviation programmes should produce development-oriented programmes (jingles, drama, talks, feature magazine etc.) to help reinforce the efforts of the government and create aggressive sensitisation and education for people on the way out of poverty.
- Stringent measures should be put in place to ensure that only truly qualified people benefit from the programmes.
- Amendment of the powers and jurisdiction of anti-corruption agencies and law enforcement agencies enabling random probes into the affairs of poverty eradication programmes and put to book anyone (beneficiaries, government officials, management staff) who diverts funds and resources of such programmes.
- Government is continuous and so should poverty alleviation programmes. Incoming government could do readjustments, but at the approval of the National Assembly, who should ensure that the proposed changes are developmental rather than political.

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